

Life in a moment

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Preface

Vincent (Yen-Cheng Chen) had invited Acharn Sujin and her sister Khun Suchit to Taiwan in September 2018 for a ten days sojourn. This was the first time for Dhamma discussions with Acharn in Taiwan. As soon as she had arrived she explained about the importance of understanding the reality of the present moment: “Life is only in a moment, like now. What appears, what is experienced now? Only one dhamma at a time”. Throughout our discussions the subject was the understanding of this moment.

Vincent had sponsored the hotel accomodation of Acharn and her sister and he organized our whole program throughout our stay. Sarah and Jonothan were assisting Acharn with the Dhamma discussions and friends from Thailand and Vietnam joined this trip. Hang from Vietnam helped me in many ways as she had done before on other trips so that I could move about in comfort.

I had come a few days earlier and stayed a little longer so that I could have more conversations with Taiwanese friends. Vincent had arranged for me hotel rooms with adapted bathrooms with many grips to hold on to, even more comfortable than at home. He went out of his way to obtain a wheel chair and a frame walker. I greatly appreciate all his efforts to make my stay most agreeable and comfortable. The first evening I went to his home where I played the piano together with his wife Jane. We played a piece by Brahms for two pianos, an enjoyable experience. Their daughter Nana and our friend Maggie I had met before were also present with Nana’s newly acquired little dog Hey hey.

Every day Vincent took me out for luncheon to a different restaurant. He arranged conversations with small groups of people in my room or in restaurant the “Mövenpick”. He translated our discussions into Mandarin and helped to add more clarifications to difficult points.

He had translated my book “The Buddha’s Path” and the printing was just ready upon my arrival so that we could give away this book to different people. He is now translating my “Abhidhamma in Daily Life”.

With Acharn and the group of friends we stayed four nights in Sun Moon Lake where we had discussions outside in a garden. During heavy rains plastic coverings were cleverly put all around. One day we could have luncheon outside surrounded by beautiful flowers and blooming shrubs. After Sun Moon Lake we all stayed in Taipei. Our program was full and very lively. We all profited from people’s interest and questions, some basic and some going into the depth of the teachings. This is the way to learn that life is only in a moment and that there is no one there.

Just before the sessions in Taiwan, Dhamma discussions were arranged in Kaeng Kracan, Thailand. I did not attend those, but I used for this book some parts I heard on the audio that Sarah and Jonothan had prepared. Moreover, I also used further discussions on our Dhamma Study Group forum on the subjects raised in Kaeng Kracan.

The real cause of trouble

On arrival at the airport the young man who pushed my wheelchair was very helpful and generous, and he did not accept a tip. I said to him that we like pleasant objects through the senses, and that it is natural that we are attached to family and friends. We should not try not to have attachment, this is impossible, but we should come to know what it is. Attachment to pleasant objects is different from kindness and generosity, they are different qualities. The Buddha taught about these in detail and how they arise from different conditions. When we arrived at the garage where Vincent had parked his car he insisted going all the way to the car, and meanwhile he listened to the explanations of Dhamma. He did not accept Vincent’s offer of further meetings

because of lack of time, but we never know whether there will be conditions in the future for hearing the Dhamma again.

The difference between ultimate reality and concepts or conventional ideas was a subject that came up again and again. People say that they can see a flower and that the flower is real. In reality seeing sees only visible object and a flower is only an idea, an object of thinking. Seeing sees visible object through the eyesense, hearing hears sound through the earsense, smelling smells odour through the nose, tasting tastes flavour through the tongue and when there is touching of tactile object, hardness, softness, heat or cold, motion or pressure are experienced through the bodysense. Throughout the discussions it was often emphasized that there are two kinds of realities: those that experience something, like seeing or hearing, and those that cannot experience anything, like visible object or sound.

Acharn asked time and again what dhamma is: it is reality, that which can be directly known through one of the senses or the mind-door. It was useful for all of us that the subject of discussions was basic notions of the Dhamma because we are forgetful of what is real. We are often absorbed in stories about concepts and situations which are not real.

In Sun Moon Lake I had to climb with my stick a very steep staircase outside in order to reach the restaurant where we had breakfast. I had my stick in one hand and Vincent supported me at the other side. He asked me: "What is reality now?" It is good to be reminded of the truth in difficult situations. I was absorbed in the steps I had to take and in my anxiety. Aversion or dosa is real, hardness appearing through the bodysense is real, but they appear just for an extremely short moment. They are just passing dhammas. It happens time and again in life that we make the circumstances and concepts we are thinking of into something very important.

During the discussions with Taiwanese friends it appeared that one of them was the victim of gossip and that she was angry about this. After we explained the difference between reality and concept she understood that in reality there is no person to be blamed for one's unhappiness. The cause of unhappiness is always within ourselves. In reality there are no persons, only citta, cetasika and rūpa. In understanding this we can become more patient and more tolerant.

The Buddha spoke about the worldly conditions that change all the time: gain and loss, honour and dishonour, happiness and misery, praise and blame. We may be praised, but soon after that we may be blamed, it all depends on conditions that are beyond control.

In the ultimate sense these worldly conditions are not situations but momentary dhammas, they arise and fall away immediately. The Buddha spoke to people with different levels of understanding and therefore he also spoke by way of conventional notions and situations. We think of being blamed or praised, but in reality people are not the cause of blame or praise but it is kamma. Akusala kamma or kusala kamma conditions an experience of an unpleasant object or pleasant object just for a moment, but we think for a long time about such experiences with akusala cittas accompanied by aversion or attachment. There is no self that can exert power over kamma, over its result, over akusala citta or kusala citta that thinks about kamma and vipāka.

Our friend who suffered from gossip said that, when looking back, she found that she could change her attitude and become more detached, she could let go of unhappiness. She used to think of self who has to experience unpleasant things but now she thinks less in this way. When we look back and consider our attitude, believing that we can let go of unhappiness, there may be an idea of self who can change his attitude. The idea of self comes in all the time and mostly it is unknown. In reality there is no self, only different moments of consciousness, cittas, accompanied by mental factors, cetasikas, that are wholesome, kusala, unwholesome, akusala or neither wholesome nor unwholesome. What we take for a person are only citta, cetasika and material phenomena, rūpa.

Life is only in a moment, like now. When we come to understand that only one dhamma at a time is experienced through one of the senses or the mind-door, we can appreciate more

that Acharn said time and again: “There is no one there”. This is not Acharn’s teaching, but it is what the Buddha explained about the truth of *anattā*. When we feel unhappy about an unpleasant event it is actually our own aversion that has been accumulated in the *citta* from moment to moment, from life to life. There is no one else to blame and we cannot say that the situation we are in is the cause. Since each *citta* is succeeded by a following one from life to life, good and bad inclinations are accumulated. The Buddha’s words saying that greed, hatred and delusion are the cause of all trouble in the world have a deep meaning. It is the accumulated attachment, aversion and ignorance that are the real cause of all trouble in our own life. This is expressed in the first quoted text of my book “The Buddha’s Path” and we often referred to this in our discussions.

We read in the “Kindred Sayings” (I, Chapter III, Kosala, Part 3, §3, The World) that King Pasenadi had a conversation with the Buddha at Sāvattihī about the cause of suffering. We read:

“...How many kinds of things, lord, that happen in the world, make for trouble, for suffering, for distress?”

“Three things, sire, happen of that nature. What are the three? Greed, hate, and delusion... these three make for trouble, for suffering, for distress...”

By listening to the Buddha’s teachings there can be more understanding of attachment, aversion and ignorance which are of many degrees. Whenever there is attachment we think of ourselves. When we want to get hold of a pen or a paper, there is likely to be attachment already, but it is mostly unknown. We are attached to friends and family members but it is good to know that we are actually attached to ourselves when we like the company of dear people.

Some degrees are very harmful such as wanting to steal something, and some are not harmful for others. We can learn to see the danger and disadvantage of all degrees of *akusala*.

When unwholesome qualities are strong they can motivate unwholesome deeds, *akusala kamma* through body, speech and mind. Wholesome qualities can motivate wholesome deeds, *kusala kamma*.

Kusala kamma, committed in the past, conditions seeing, hearing and other sense-cognitions to experience pleasant objects and *akusala kamma* conditions the experience of unpleasant objects. These moments which are *vipākacittas*, *cittas* that are result, are extremely brief and it is hard to know whether they are results of *kusala kamma*, *kusala vipākacittas*, or of *akusala kamma*, *akusala vipākacittas*. When we think about them they have fallen away already.

Sense-cognitions, which are *vipākacittas*, arise in a process of *cittas* and shortly after they have fallen away, wholesome *cittas*, *kusala cittas*, arise which experience the object in a wholesome way, or *akusala cittas*, which experience the object in an unwholesome way. It depends on conditions what type of *citta* arises at a particular moment. When we think about an object that was experienced, this type of *citta* is either *kusala* or *akusala*, it cannot be otherwise. The Buddha taught about *citta*, *cetasika* and *rūpa* in detail in order to help beings to understand that whatever arises does so because of its proper conditions and that there is no self who could control any reality.

Someone asked what the purpose is of the study of so many details of mental phenomena and physical phenomena. When facing troubles in life such as the loss of a dear person, she would realize that life is such, and she was wondering why she would need to study the teachings. When we wonder what the purpose is of study it is just thinking. *Paññā*, understanding, is needed to appreciate to know the truth, to know what is reality. Without having heard the teachings we would believe that a self really exists, not knowing that we cling to what is only an idea, not a reality, and we would take what is *akusala* for *kusala*. We would mislead ourselves all the time.

By hearing the teachings and considering what appears at the present moment there will be a beginning of intellectual understanding, *pariyatti*, and when this has become firmer, it can

condition later on direct understanding, *paṭipatti*. This was emphasized many times throughout our discussions.

Seeing sees only visible object, but it seems that we immediately see people and things. We believe that we touch a table, but in reality only tactile object such as hardness or temperature is experienced. We asked a friend to actually touch what she believed was a table. When she touched the table she began to understand that the reality of hardness appeared, not a table. She began to understand what dhamma, reality, is. When someone begins to see what was not understood before it is evident that understanding begins to develop. *Paññā* can be accumulated little by little. *Paññā* is not self but only a *cetasika* that can accompany *kusala citta*.

The sign, *nimitta*, of what is experienced

Seeing sees visible object and then it falls away, and very shortly afterwards there are other moments of seeing visible object. Realities succeed one another so rapidly that it seems that they can stay. It seems that visible object lasts for a while, but in reality it arises and falls away. Acharn Sujin used the simile of a torch that is swung around. We have the impression of a whole, of a circle of light, but this is caused by many moments of light.

We cannot pinpoint which visible object is experienced at the present moment, there are many of them arising and falling away very rapidly. Only an impression or mental image, *nimitta*, of visible object remains. This causes us to think that visible object does not fall away.

We know that seeing arises at this moment, but we cannot pinpoint the *citta* which sees, it arises and falls away very rapidly and then there is another moment of seeing. We only experience the impression or sign of seeing.

The topic of *nimitta* or sign came up several times during our discussions. Some one asked what *nimitta* is and Acharn answered:

“It is there now. It is there because of the rapid arising and falling away of realities. No matter which unit of visible object is arising and falling away, it keeps on arising and falling away so that it forms up the sign (*nimitta*) of it as something that can be seen. Whenever there is seeing there is the sign of the rapid arising and falling away of realities.”

In the “Discourse on the Sixfold Cleansing” (Middle Length Sayings III, 112) the Buddha speaks about a monk who declares “profound knowledge”, who states that he has reached the end of birth, thus, that he is an arahat. The Buddha said that he might be questioned about his understanding so that one knows whether he speaks the truth. In this sutta we read about all realities appearing through the six doors which are the objects of right understanding, no matter whether someone is a beginner on the Path or an arahat.

We read about his “guarding of the six doors” through mindfulness:

“If I saw visible object with the eye I was not entranced by the general appearance, I was not entranced by the detail. If I dwelt with this organ of sight uncontrolled, covetousness and dejection, evil unskilled states, might flow in. So I fared along controlling it, I guarded the organ of sight, I achieved control over it...”

The “general appearance” in this text stands for *nimitta*¹. We are attached to the *nimittas* of the sense objects and to their details.

Acharn asked whether there is *nimitta* in a dream. When we are dreaming it seems that we see persons and different things, but we are not really seeing but thinking of different concepts. The concepts of realities are experienced. Also when someone attains *jhāna* the object of *jhānacitta* is usually a concept, such as a disc made of earth or a coloured disc. When concentration of the

¹The Pāli text has *nimitta*.

level of samatha is more developed there is no need anymore to look at the disc made of earth, but a mental image can be experienced.

We read in the Visuddhimagga (Ch XII,8):

“Now, the kasiṇa preliminary work is difficult for a beginner and only one in a hundred or a thousand can do it. The arousing of the sign is difficult for one who has done the preliminary work and only one in a hundred or a thousand can do it. To extend the sign when it has arisen and to reach absorption is difficult and only one in a hundred or a thousand can do it...”

This clearly shows us that samatha developed to the stage of jhāna, absorption concentration, is not for everyone.

Sarah wrote:

“Even these jhānacittas and development of samatha are just conditioned dhammas. No one actually ‘can do’ anything or ‘has done’ anything. It just depends, like now, as to what dhammas there are conditions for, at anytime, and as all such dhammas are aniccā, dukkha and anattā, they are not of any consequence or to be attached to for an instant.”

The whole day we experience concepts of people and things. Memory, saññā, that accompanies each citta, is the condition that we remember and think of the shape and form and details of things. We experience nimittas of concepts. A mental image experienced of Nana’s dog Hey-hey was given as an example. On account of many moments of seeing visible object there is remembrance and thinking of the concept dog.

In different contexts there are different meanings of nimitta: it can be nimitta of each of the five khandhas, thus, nimitta of conditioned realities, nimitta in samatha, nimitta of a concept like in a dream or of a concept just now, in daily life.

Acharn explained, in Kaeng Kracan, that what appears is only nimitta. When there is seeing only the sign or nimitta of the rapid arising and falling away of visible object is experienced. Visible object cannot be a thing or a person which stays. She said: “This is wise consideration: that actually now saññā is remembering the nimitta as something, all the time. That is perversity of saññā, saññā vipallāsa.” She explained that because saññā marks each object there can be the remembrance of the sign that is experienced. Without saññā there could be no thinking. Sarah said that when there is understanding of nimitta there is no idea of things lasting long. Actually, in understanding more about nimitta we are reminded that life is just in a moment.

In the “Visuddhimagga” saññā is called “nimitta-maker”, nimitta karaṇa. We read in the definition of saññā in the “Visuddhimagga” (XIV 130):

“All (saññā) has the characteristic of recognition (sañjānana); its property is the making of representation (nimitta) that is a condition of recognizing again, ‘this is the very same thing’ - as carpenters and so on do with the wood, etc.; its manifestation is the producing of conviction by virtue of a representation (nimitta) that has been accordingly learnt - like the blind perceiving the elephant². Its basis is whatever object that has come near - like the recognition (saññā) ‘people’ that arises for young animals in respect of scarecrows.”

The term “representation” in this text stands for nimitta. Saññā marks each object that is experienced by citta and cetasikas, so that it can be remembered or recognized later on. Thus, saññā makes a sign, a nimitta, and moreover, saññā itself is experienced by way of nimitta since it arises and falls away very rapidly.

²Abblind person who touches its tusk thinks that this is the elephant, and the same for someone who touches its tail, leg or other parts.

Sarah wrote (on Dhamma Study Group, the internet forum) about saññā:

“Hence we can say we live in the world of saññā, or rather the nimitta of saññā. There is saññā at each moment but it depends on vitakka what is thought about, which memory is the object of the dream world. It is saññā at moments of seeing and hearing which also conditions kusala and akusala which follows on account of what is seen, on account of the nimitta of visible object.”

Sarah also wrote about saññā:

“Just like at night-time when we are dreaming, so now we are usually lost in dreams and ideas and fantasies on account of what has been remembered and marked about various sense objects experienced. Without memory of those experiences, there would be no thinking about them, no fantasies or dreams at all.

Therefore it is also on account of what has been remembered and marked, i.e. the signs and details of what has been experienced before, that kusala (wholesome) and akusala (unwholesome) kinds of thinking arise and accumulate; one may be attached, have aversion or be ignorant of what is experienced, or one may be aware and understand what appears.

We live in the world of saññā. It is also why it is a separate khandha.”

During our discussions in Taiwan people were wondering how saññā can remember things. How can it remember or recognize what is gone already? They were wondering whether it is accumulated from moment to moment. When we speak about accumulation it is with reference to the function of javana, the moments of kusala cittas or akusala cittas, in a process. Sense-cognitions such as seeing arise and shortly after that kusala cittas or akusala cittas arise. The cittas that perform the function of javana can be kusala citta or akusala citta, and, in the case of the arahat, kiriyacitta. Thus, only saññā arising with the javana-citta accumulates. But since saññā accompanies every citta the saññā of each moment conditions the succeeding saññā by way of contiguity-condition, anantara-paccaya. By way of this condition each citta and its accompanying cetasikas condition the succeeding citta throughout life. Different types of conditions have to be distinguished.

Acharn said about saññā: “Saññā marks the object and there are uncountable saññās; they are a condition for thinking. After seeing there is thinking. It takes a long time to understand saññā as saññā. Just hear it again and again, no expectation to understand. As soon as there is memory it is saññā, not ‘I’. When one tries very hard to know it, it is attachment. It is there all day.”

There are many kinds of saññā, such as attā-saññā, wrong remembrance of self. Because of saññā we have an image of self time and again. When paññā has been developed there can be anattā-saññā, right remembrance as non-self. As Acharn said, we have to hear the Dhamma again and again, without expectation of having full understanding soon.

The precision of Abhidhamma

When we were in Sun Moon Lake I said to Sarah that I like to hear Acharn talk again and again about seeing. She remarked that this could be attachment. If a good Dhamma friend had not reminded me I would not have realized this.

Later on she said: “The best thing is understanding what is heard, little by little. When we think: ‘I like to understand that’, it is not the moment of understanding”.

As Acharn said, there is attachment all day and many moments are unknown, such as liking to understand something.

A question that is often asked is : “How can I have less anger.” When one asks this it shows a lack of understanding what dhamma really is: a conditioned reality. One thinks of a self who

would like to have less anger. Anger, *dosa*, is a *cetasika* that accompanies *akusala citta*. It has been accumulated from life to life and, thus, it has conditions for its arising. There are many shades and degrees of it: it can arise when there is a slight feeling of uneasiness, or it can be stronger in the form of anger. People are inclined to think of a conventional idea of anger that can stay and that they would like to master so that it goes away. They think of situations and other people who cause them to be angry instead of understanding the reality that arises just for a moment. It is important to see the difference between ultimate realities and conventional ideas. *Citta*, *cetasika* and *rūpa* are the ultimate realities in our life. They arise just for a moment because of conditions and then fall away immediately. When we think of stories about our anger, about ourselves who want to be different we are thinking about what is not real, we are thinking of ourselves.

We should remember that life is realities such as seeing, hearing, hardness, sound, just *nāmas* and *rūpas* appearing one at a time. Life exists just in a moment. We find situations and ideas so important that we forget what life is at the present moment. As Azita reminded me:

“Even when we hear ‘there is no one here at all’ and have heard this for a number of years, most of the time we are obsessed with self - my anger, my generosity. I believe there has to be reminders again and again and again that this is the truth of life.

Then we could ask ‘what is life?’ Realities such as seeing, hearing, tasting which arise for a very brief moment then gone never to arise again, ever, all by conditions, no one here to control or choose what will be experienced the very next moment.”

The most valuable moments in our life are understanding reality as it is and then we do not take *dhammas* which are gone for permanent or self, we are not concerned with stories. Sarah spoke in Kaeng Kracan about disturbances in life: “Every time there is disturbance it is just the *citta* that thinks. All are just *dhammas*, not belonging to anyone, never to return, not of any importance.”

Acharn explained that it is a relieve to have more understanding of *anattā*, to begin to see *anattā*. One understands that what occurs cannot be any other way.

In Sun Moon Lake we were in Acharn’s room with Sarah and Jonothan where we had an opportunity to talk informally about our life now. In another room there was, at the same time, a meeting with Taiwanese friends and Acharn’s words spoken in English were translated into Mandarin.

Some people believe that they can decide what to think about, but even that moment of thinking is conditioned, not a self who is choosing an object. Sarah asked: “Can we choose what we think now?” There are realities such as seeing, hearing, thinking, pleasant feeling, visible object, sound, hardness, and this is actually life from moment to moment. Some realities can experience an object and some realities do not experience any object. Life is just seeing, visible object, hearing, sound or thinking. *Citta*, *cetasika* and *rūpa* are arising and falling away. The table, the fruit and sweets on the table are not realities, they are merely concepts we can think about.

A young woman came to Acharn’s room and asked Acharn what love is. Acharn asked whether love is liking another person or just liking oneself. If there would be no eyes or ears there would not be any idea of a person. She answered that she worries about the person she loves. Acharn answered where that person is and she answered: “In the mind.”

Acharn said: “What is there in the mind? Sometimes love, sometimes hatred. Love is real. It is not seeing. Life is feeling, is there feeling now? What kind of feeling is there?”

Acharn often asks questions in order to help people to understand what is real. When feeling arises and appears our life is feeling at that moment. When we use the word love in daily language we think of a whole situation. There is another person and “I”, and we think of a relationship that exists between persons. In reality there are no persons, no relationship that

exists, no situation, only citta, cetasika and rūpa that are fleeting moments. It is difficult to understand the difference between conventional notions and ultimate realities.

Sarah asked the young woman what the difference is between feeling and liking. When there is liking is there feeling at the same time?

Acharn said: “When there is understanding of anything, it has to be now, no matter what we are talking about. When we talk about feeling, is there feeling now? One is used to having feeling but one does not know what feeling is. It has to be known when it is there, otherwise we are just talking.”

This is an important principle: we should verify the realities that appear. Otherwise we just engage in theory, in the “story” about realities. We can so easily mislead ourselves about the truth.

The reality of feeling is quite different from the conventional idea of feeling that we used to have before hearing the Buddha’s teaching. The Abhidhamma gives details about the different types of feeling that arise, about happy feeling, unhappy feeling, and indifferent feeling. Moreover, there are pleasant bodily feeling and painful bodily feeling which are conditioned by impact on the bodysense. Each citta is accompanied by a specific type of feeling. For example, akusala citta rooted in attachment can be accompanied by happy feeling or indifferent feeling and kusala citta can be accompanied by happy feeling or indifferent feeling. When we feel happy we may easily take akusala citta rooted in attachment for kusala citta. All such details are taught in order to show that whatever arises is conditioned and that we cannot be master of it. We can learn to understand whatever arises and in this way paññā can develop. It is all about daily life.

If there were no citta the world could not appear. When citta arises it experiences different objects: seeing experiences visible object, hearing experiences sound, and the other sense-cognitions experience their appropriate objects. When we think of the world we think of a whole, a collection of impressions, but there are only different objects experienced by a citta, one at a time. Each citta is accompanied by cetasikas that experience the same object and each have their own function while they assist citta in the experience of the object.

At least seven cetasikas have to accompany each citta, such as feeling, remembrance, or contact, (phassa), that contacts the object so that citta can experience it.

Also cetanā, intention or volition, accompanies each citta. Its function is coordinating the tasks of the accompanying cetasikas. It can accompany kusala citta, akusala citta, vipākacitta (citta which is result), and kiryacitta, citta that is neither cause nor result. This is volition which is conascent kamma (sahajata kamma)³ Volition accompanying kusala citta or akusala citta which is of sufficient strength can motivate wholesome deeds or unwholesome deeds through body, speech or mind that produce results. When it has produced result arising later on it is asynchronous kamma, kamma working from a different time, nāṇakkhaṇika kamma. People usually think of the “story of kamma and vipāka” instead of knowing realities that present themselves one at a time. When something unpleasant occurs to them they think: “This is my kamma”. Through the Buddha’s teachings we learn to distinguish different realities, and to know them more precisely. The subject of kamma and vipāka came up several times during our discussions.

If life is not seen as different moments some of which are cause and some results, and if one thinks of a self who is performing deeds or receiving results one may have all kinds of dilemmas about kamma and vipāka. People wonder why they have to be punished for what was done in a former life. “I was not there”, they think. We should not think of “I” or person. There are just passing dhammas, some are cause, some are effect. Or people wonder whether it makes sense to do good deeds when there is nobody who will receive results in a future life. This is again

³We usually think of kamma as an unwholesome or wholesome deed, but actually, it is cetanā, volition.

thinking of “stories” about self and “my good deeds” instead of knowing the present reality as non-self. However, when something unpleasant happens one tends to forget about the truth.

My sister’s dog cannot stand a walker and she never stopped barking in an aggressive way to me with my walker, even snapping at my trousers. When we played the piano she was quiet for a while and then started barking at me again and again. I felt lost and thought of Acharn’s words: there is no one there. But how can that solve my problem: no dog there, no me who feels badly about it. But I remembered the way I spoke to our friend who was the victim of gossip: nobody else is to blame for our disturbances, the cause is only in ourselves. But now, something unpleasant was happening to me. I was forgetful of kamma and vipāka. Hearing sound is vipākacitta and thinking of the meaning, thinking of how aggressive the dog was is akusala citta. It is so helpful that the Buddha taught us different realities: vipākacitta being entirely different from being lost in stories, thinking with akusala cittas about a long, long story. This happening was a good reminder to me.

Sarah wrote to me on account of my story about the dog: “When there are conditions for disturbance, for worry and fear and distress, it has to be like that, it cannot be any other way. But it doesn’t last, it’s dhamma which passes instantly. Like now, no disturbance or worry, but still conditions to think of the story about it. Very natural - same for everyone, dwelling on what has gone and forgetting about passing dhammas now.”

Vincent remarked: “We are reminded that citta is always alone, there is no dog in the sound; vipākacitta is the result of kamma, not a self who experiences. And the problem is the accumulated defilements that follow, which are also anattā. What a profound and beautiful meaning, though I usually don’t remember it. The sign of beauty or resentment takes over so quickly, instead of apprehending what is really there.”

Sarah wrote: “That’s the answer - only the understanding of dhammas, the understanding that each moment of hearing, each moment of thinking is conditioned, not self - can ‘solve’ the problem for that moment only.”

Vincent said: “Yes, only understanding can solve all the problems. Understanding works its way, anattā!”

Conditions

“What is life” was a question Acharn often asked the listeners. We usually think of life as lasting for some time. But in reality life exists in this moment: citta, cetasika and rūpa, arising and falling away. When seeing arises, life is seeing, when thinking arises, life is thinking and thinking may be kusala or akusala.

Many different types of citta arise in a day, and, mostly they are akusala cittas. Even when doing a good deed, kusala cittas and akusala cittas alternate so fast. We think of ourselves, we want to be a good person; we cling to an idea of my kusala. When we think about good deeds, the cittas that think are gone already.

We often think of dāna, liberality, or sīla as a whole situation, we think of ourselves as being generous to others or as speaking kind words to others, but it is the wholesome citta that motivates deeds and speech, it is not a self. It depends on conditions what type of citta arises at a particular moment.

The Buddha often spoke about seeing, visible object, hearing or thinking. He asked about each reality whether it is permanent or impermanent. This reminds us that only one reality appears at a time and that it does not stay. When seeing appears, there is no hearing or thinking at the same time. Acharn often explains about seeing and visible object appearing at this moment so that we can begin to understand the reality of the present moment instead of

clinging to a whole situation. And even when we live in the world of concepts it is only thinking, arising because of its own conditions.

In Sun Moon Lake some newcomers asked questions. Two French women wanted to know more about the present moment. Acharn asked them whether they saw anything right now. She asked what seeing is and what is seen. She explained that we take what is seen all the time as some “thing”. She asked what can be known at the moment of seeing. It is visible object that has impinged on the eyesense. It is only a reality that can be seen, and it must be now. Nobody can change it. Seeing arises just to see, it cannot be self. Each moment has its proper conditions. She remarked:

“It is real, it appears now and it does not belong to anyone. Nobody can make seeing arise, impossible.”

In the seventh book of the Abhidhamma, the book of the “Paṭṭhāna” all possible relations between phenomena have been explained. Each reality in our life can only occur because of a concurrence of different conditions which operate in a very intricate way.

These conditions are not abstractions, they operate now, in our daily life. What we take for our mind and our body are mere elements which arise because of their appropriate conditions and are devoid of self. In the planes of existence where there are *nāma* and *rūpa*, *kamma* produces at the first moment of life not only *citta* and *cetasikas* but also *rūpa*. *Rūpas* always arise in groups (*kalapas*), and at that moment *kamma* produces three groups of *rūpa*: one group with bodysense, one group with the heartbase and one group with sex. The heartbase is the physical base of all *cittas* apart from the sense-cognitions which have their appropriate sense-bases, such as eyesense, as their base. It is called heartbase but we do not need to think of “heart” in conventional sense. As to sex, born as a male or female is due to *kamma*.

The element of heat is present in each group of *rūpa*, and this element produces other groups of *rūpa* at the moment of presence of the rebirth-consciousness.⁴

A group of *rūpa* consists of at least eight *rūpas* arising and falling away together: the four great elements of solidity, cohesion, temperature or heat, motion, as well as visible object, odour, flavour and nutritive essence. *Rūpas* of the body can be produced by *kamma*, *citta*, temperature or nutrition. *Rūpas* outside (not of the body) are produced only by temperature. It is useful to learn about such details, since it shows us that each *rūpa* in a group is conditioned by the other *rūpas* in that group. For example, visible objects are all different because the accompanying *rūpas* in the same group are of different qualities all the time. Understanding more about conditions gradually eliminates the idea of being able to control realities.

Acharn explained that we may hear many times about seeing, but that the idea of “I see” cannot be eradicated soon. We were clinging to all realities during countless lives. The idea of self is so strong, even if we say that there are only different realities. Acharn repeated that seeing is just a reality and that this is the beginning of understanding it as not self. It is conditioned and it arises and falls away. How could we control what arises and falls away immediately.

The rebirth-consciousness is the first *citta* in life produced by *kamma* and throughout our life *kamma* produces seeing, hearing and the other sense-cognitions as well as the *rūpas* which are the sense-bases. The *cittas* which arise are dependent on many different conditions. We tend to forget that seeing is only a conditioned reality and that visible object is only a conditioned reality, and instead of developing understanding of realities as they appear one at a time, we are easily carried away by stories on account of what was seen or heard. Each *citta* experiences an object, be it a sense object or an object appearing through the mind-door, and the object conditions *citta* by object-condition, *ārammaṇa-paccaya*. It is beneficial to remember that seeing, hearing and the other sense-cognitions are *vipākacittas*, *cittas* which are results of *kamma*. They arise at their appropriate bases (*vatthus*), which are also produced by *kamma*.

⁴Three “submoments” of *citta* can be discerned: the moment of its arising, of its presence and of its ceasing.

Hearing is conditioned by sound which impinges on the earsense. Both sound and earsense are rūpas which also arise because of their own conditions and fall away. Thus, hearing, a reality which is conditioned by sound and earsense, cannot last either; it also has to fall away. Each conditioned reality can exist just for an extremely short moment. There is no self who can exert control over realities. When we move our hands, when we walk, when we laugh or cry, when we are attached or worried, there is no self but only different realities arising because of conditions.

Cittas succeed one another without any interval. The citta that has just fallen away conditions the succeeding citta and this is by way of proximity-condition (anantara-paccaya). Seeing arises time and again and after seeing has fallen away akusala cittas usually arise. In each process of cittas there are, after the sense-cognitions have fallen away, several moments of kusala cittas or akusala cittas, performing the function of javana⁵ These experience the object in a wholesome way or unwholesome way. There are usually seven javana-cittas and each preceding javana-citta conditions the following one by way of repetition-condition (āsevana-paccaya).

We cling to visible object, or we have wrong view about it, taking it for a being or a person that really exists. Defilements arise because they have been accumulated and they are carried on, from moment to moment, from life to life. They are a natural decisive support-condition (pakatūpanissaya-paccaya), for akusala citta arising at this moment.

The “Paṭṭhāna” helps us to understand the deep underlying motives for our behaviour and the conditions for our defilements. It explains, for example, that kusala, wholesomeness, can be the object of akusala citta, unwholesome citta. On account of generosity which is wholesome, attachment, wrong view or conceit, which are unwholesome realities, can arise. The “Paṭṭhāna” also explains that akusala can be the object of kusala, for example, when akusala is considered with right understanding as only a conditioned dhamma. This is an essential point which is often overlooked. If one thinks that akusala cannot be object of awareness and right understanding, the eightfold Path cannot be developed. One tries to ignore it instead of knowing it as it really is: a conditioned dhamma.

People say that they try to have wholesome thoughts, but when there is more understanding of conditions one will see that it is impossible to try to direct one’s thoughts in a certain way. Thinking arises because of its proper conditions and it falls away immediately.

Birth as a human or a deva is the result of kusala kamma, whereas an unhappy rebirth such as in a hell plane or as an animal is the result of akusala kamma. Usually people think of birth as a situation, they think that a human being is born, or that a dog is born. Actually, birth is only one moment of citta, vipākacitta produced by kamma. People tend to be afraid of death since the rebirth following upon it may be unhappy. If one is born as an animal one cannot develop the understanding that eventually leads to the end of all defilements and to the end rebirth. It is of no use to be afraid since it depends on conditions what will be the next rebirth. This was one of the topics of discussion in Taiwan before the sessions started with Acharn and the whole group. The Buddha, when he, as a Bodhisatta, left his palace in his last life, had a faithful horse Kandaka. Kandaka died and was reborn as a deva; in that life he attained the first stage of enlightenment, the stage of the sotāpanna. This shows that we can never know ahead of time what will happen.

Acharn explained that only one kamma produces rebirth-consciousness, but that in the rebirth-consciousness other kammās have been accumulated which can produce result in this life⁶. Kamma needs the support of decisive natural dependent condition in order to be able to produce result. This shows us how complex the operation of kamma producing vipāka is.

In reality there are just nāmas and rūpas in our life that arise because of different conditions.

⁵Javana is sometimes translated as impulsion. It can mean: going. In the case of the arahat they are neither kusala nor akusala, they are kiriya-cittas, inoperative cittas.

⁶āyūhana is a term denoting the accumulated kamma.

There is accumulation of kamma and of good and bad qualities. What has been accumulated from life to life can bring result and effect today.

During our discussions it appeared that some people believe in a soul. The idea of a soul suggests a mental reality that stays. However there are only ever-changing citta and accompanying cetasikas that arise and fall away. Conditions all the time. There is no soul that passes away from this life and goes to a next life.

Some people wonder why they have to receive an unpleasant result produced by an ill deed done in a past life. It makes no sense to think in terms of persons, or even of “me” in a former life or a future life, there are no persons. Just conditioned realities. There is a connection of past, present, and future. Only, it is not “us”. Just dhammas rolling on, beyond control.

The Buddha taught us to understand the present reality so that there will be less confusion in life. He spoke time and again about seeing. Seeing is vipākacitta, the result of kamma. On account of what is seen attachment, aversion and ignorance are bound to arise. We may worry about different situations and that is the reality of aversion, dosa, different from vipāka. Thinking which arises after the vipākacitta is most of the time akusala and it is important to discern the difference between vipāka and thinking which follows so closely. We worry mostly about ourselves, we cling to what is beneficial for ourselves.

Acharn often reminds us that when we are thinking of others, helping them in different ways there is no longer worry about ourselves. When we see worry as only a passing dhamma we shall attach less importance to our own benefit.

Acharn said once: “When one forgets about one’s own benefit, there can be kusala citta thinking of the others, listening to their useless or unpleasant talk. One thinks and thinks but it’s only thinking. Whatever happens does so by conditions. When one is flexible, one helps the others more and forgets about one’s own ‘advantage’, in developing kusala and there will be less clinging to oneself. In this way one can go anywhere, see anyone, help in any situation, listen to any talk.”

We can say many times that seeing is not self, but there cannot be clear understanding of it yet when paññā is at the level of intellectual understanding, not yet direct understanding. This is normal, and paññā has to begin, a little at the time. It can be understood that it is just a reality. That is the way it develops. Acharn reminds us that there was clinging to seeing as “I see” during so many lives. She always says: “The study of what the Buddha taught has to be at this moment.” What is seeing now, hearing now, thinking now?

We read in “Duality 2” (“Kindred Sayings”, Second Fifty, § 93) about conditions for the arising of realities:

“Owing to a dual (thing), brethren, consciousness comes into being. And what, brethren, is that dual owing to which consciousness comes into being?

Owing to the eye and objects arises eye-consciousness. The eye is impermanent, changing, its state is ‘becoming otherness’. Thus this dual, mobile and transitory, impermanent, changing - its state is ‘becoming otherness’.

Eye-consciousness is impermanent, changing, its state is ‘becoming otherness’. That condition, that relation of the uprising of eye-consciousness - they also are impermanent, changing, their state is ‘becoming otherness’. This eye-consciousness, arising as it does from an impermanent relation - how could it be permanent?

Now the striking together, the falling together, the meeting together of these three things - this, brethren, is called ‘eye-contact.’ Eye-Contact is impermanent, changing, - its state is ‘becoming otherness’. That condition, that relation of the uprising of eye-contact - they also are impermanent. . . This eye-contact, arising as it does from an impermanent relation - how could it be permanent?

Contacted, brethren, one feels. Contacted, one is aware. Contacted, one perceives. Thus these states also are mobile and transitory, impermanent and changing. Their state is ‘becoming otherness’...”

The same is said with regard to the other doorways.

Different Aspects of Dhamma

People may not see that Abhidhamma is about real life, that it is not theory at all. The Abhidhamma teaches about all realities of daily life. We are inclined to take for wholesome what is unwholesome, we are ignorant of realities. Through the Abhidhamma we come to understand what is kusala and what is akusala and what are the conditions for their arising. When people feel happy they believe that this is good and wholesome. But through the Abhidhamma we learn that happy feeling can be selfish or that it can be noble and wholesome. It depends on what type of citta happy feeling accompanies. We are happy to be in the company of dear people, parents and friends. But this may be selfish affection, not wholesome. We just think of our own liking. On the other hand, happy feeling can arise with wholesome consciousness. One does not think of one's own pleasure or gain, but only about someone else's welfare, wanting to help him. This is just an example showing that we may mislead ourselves all the time, taking for unselfish love what is in reality selfish affection.

We mourn the loss of dear people, but it is good to know what type of citta arises. We are unhappy because we are no longer in the company of dear people we love. This shows again how much we cling to our own feeling. When we do not get what we like we have aversion. Our whole life we search for what we like. We find our liking and disliking most important, but they are only passing realities that arise for an extremely short moment and then fall away. We should remember the following sutta from the “Sutta Nipata” (Selected Texts from the Sutta Nipata, “The Arrow”, translated by John D. Ireland. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1983).

“Unindicated and unknown is the length of life of those subject to death. Life is difficult and brief and bound up with suffering. There is no means by which those who are born will not die. Having reached old age, there is death. This is the natural course for a living being. With ripe fruits there is the constant danger that they will fall. In the same way, for those born and subject to death, there is always the fear of dying. Just as the pots made by a potter all end by being broken, so death is (the breaking up) of life.

The young and old, the foolish and the wise, all are stopped short by the power of death, all finally end in death. Of those overcome by death and passing to another world, a father cannot hold back his son, nor relatives a relation. See! While the relatives are looking on and weeping, one by one each mortal is led away like an ox to slaughter.

In this manner the world is afflicted by death and decay. But the wise do not grieve, having realized the nature of the world. You do not know the path by which they came or departed. Not seeing either end you lament in vain. If any benefit is gained by lamenting, the wise would do it. Only a fool would harm himself. Yet through weeping and sorrowing the mind does not become calm, but still more suffering is produced, the body is harmed and one becomes lean and pale, one merely hurts oneself. One cannot protect a departed one (peta) by that means. To grieve is in vain.”

As we read: “But the wise do not grieve, having realized the nature of the world.” The world is actually just dhammas that arise and fall away.

Acharn often asked us during the discussions: “What is life?” Life only lasts one moment, a moment of citta that experiences an object.

We read in the “Visuddhimagga”, “The Path of Purification” (VIII, 39):

“In the absolute sense, beings have only a very short moment to live, life lasting as long as a single moment of consciousness lasts. Just as a cart-wheel, whether rolling or whether at a standstill, at all times only rests on a single point of its periphery, even so the life of a living being lasts only for the duration of a single moment of consciousness. As soon as that moment ceases, the being also ceases. For it is said: ‘The being of the past moment of consciousness has lived, but does not live now, nor will it live in future. The being of the future moment has not yet lived, nor does it live now, but it will live in the future. The being of the present moment has not lived, it does live just now, but it will not live in the future.’ ”

Before hearing the teachings we believed that we knew a great deal about life, but after learning what the Buddha taught we come to realize that we have ignorance about the most common realities of life. We think that there is seeing all the time when our eyes are open, the world seems to be bright. The Buddha taught about cittas that experience different object at different moments, one at a time. When there is seeing, there is no hearing or thinking at the same time. When visible object is experienced by seeing the world is bright, but when hearing arises sound is experienced and the world is dark. At all other moments apart from seeing the world is dark, but we mistakenly think that brightness lasts. Brightness seems to be all around us all the time. Cittas arise and fall away extremely rapidly and that is why it seems that seeing can stay on.

In order to help people to see the truth the Buddha taught many aspects of realities. He taught realities under the aspect of elements, of khandhas, of āyātanas (sensefields), of the Dependent Origination (Paṭicca Samuppāda), and in many other ways.

The Dependent Origination deals with the conditionality of all mental phenomena, nāma, and physical phenomena, rūpa, of life. Ignorance is the first link of the Dependent Origination. Because of ignorance we have to be reborn again and again. It conditions kamma that produces vipāka and because of vipāka defilements arise on account of the objects experienced through the senses and the mind-door. Defilements condition kamma that produces vipāka again in the form of rebirth and sense-cognitions during life. In that way the cycle of birth and death continues.

The Dependent Origination is not theory, it pertains to our life now. During our discussions in Taiwan Acharn asked us a number of questions in order to remind us of reality now. She asked us about avijjā, ignorance:

“Is avijjā a reality? Does it belong to you? How can there be conditions for understanding avijjā right now? What is it that avijjā does not understand? It does not know seeing that arises and falls away. It does not really know what seeing is. Understanding can know what seeing is. Without eyes can there be seeing? Usually we take it for something or for ‘I’. There is the idea of ‘I see’. Now we talk about the Dependent Origination but we do not mention this term. Is the visible object that is seen also Dependent Origination? The Dependent Origination is all about now.”

The purpose of teaching the Dependent Origination is to help beings understand that there is no self who travels from a past life to this life and again to future lives; no self who is ignorant, who feels, who clings.

Another subject discussed during our sessions was the “āyatanas”. The Pali term “āyatana” is sometimes translated as “sphere of sense”, or “sense-field”. We read in the “Book of Analysis”

(Vibhaṅga), the second book of the Abhidhamma⁷, in “Analysis of the Bases”, about the twelve āyatana, here translated as “bases”. There are inner āyatana and outward āyatana. The inner āyatana are the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body, and the mind, which includes all citta. The outer āyatana are: visible object, sound, odour, flavour, tangible object and dhammāyatana. Dhammāyatana includes: cetasika, subtle rūpa and nibbāna. Āyatana deals with the association of inner and outer āyatana. Thus, āyatana always refers to the meeting, the association of several realities. When seeing arises there is the association of eyesense, visible object, seeing and its accompanying cetasika. These are only āyatana at the moment they arise and associate. The classification by way of āyatana shows us that seeing and all the other realities are associating because of conditions. Nobody can make them arise, they are not self. Here we see again that the Abhidhamma points to the goal, the development of right understanding.

During our discussions it was emphasized time and again that there are two kind of realities: those that experience an object (nāma) and those that do not experience anything (rūpa). We can understand this intellectually, but when paññā is more developed the difference between nāma and rūpa can be directly known. Because of our accumulated ignorance we often confuse visible object and seeing, sound and hearing, we cannot clearly distinguish their different characteristics when they appear. So long as we do not distinguish nāma and rūpa from each other we will not be able to realize their arising and falling away. Then we will continue to cling to the idea of beings or things which last.

The first stage of insight is knowing the difference between the characteristic of nāma and of rūpa. We discussed this during our sessions. We may be inclined to see this stage in an abstract way but it pertains to any nāma or rūpa appearing now. As Acharn had explained before: “Actually, we don’t even have to use the words nāma and rūpa. When there is the understanding of all kinds of realities, those which experience an object and those which don’t, the understanding of nāma and rūpa is there already.

They are different but there is no need to name them. They are different already by their nature.

That which sees is the characteristic of nāma, now. In that way one can become closer to understanding that it is nāma, instead of knowing beforehand, this is nāma, this is rūpa.”

Sarah explained: “We may be thinking this is nāma, that is rūpa, but the reality right now has its own characteristic as nāma or as rūpa. Nāma and rūpa are just the realities now. Seeing now, hearing now, lobha now are nāmas, so the understanding of nāma is just the understanding of any of these dhammas appearing now. It’s the same for rūpas. The understanding of rūpa is just the understanding of visible object, sound, hardness or any other rūpa appearing now. If there is no development of understanding and awareness of these realities in daily life now, there can never be vipassanā ñāṇa, the direct and clear understanding of dhammas.”

When there can be awareness of one reality at a time appearing through one doorway we will begin to understand the present moment. We can begin to understand what the meaning is of experiencing an object, of nāma. We learnt that kusala citta is different from akusala citta but when paññā is of the level of intellectual understanding we do not clearly know the truth of these realities.

Life is just citta, cetasika and rūpa, arising and falling away. When we are walking, moving around, or talking, there are citta, cetasika and rūpa, arising because of their proper conditions.

Citta conditions different groups of rūpa. As we have seen, each group of rūpa contains at

⁷This book can be read together with its commentary, the “Sammohavinodanī”, attributed to Buddhaghosa and translated as “The Dispeller of Delusion”, in two volumes. The commentary is most helpful for the understanding of the Abhidhamma, that is, the understanding of one’s own life. Buddhaghosa illustrates the meaning of the realities taught in the “Book of Analysis” in a lively way with examples from daily life.

least eight rūpas, and citta can condition such groups. Moreover, citta conditions together with the group of these eight rūpas bodily intimation, kāya viññatti, and it also conditions together with the group of these eight rūpas and sound the rūpa which is speech intimation, vacī viññatti. When we convey a meaning by gestures or speech it is conditioned by citta. This reminds us that it is not a self who does so. In the groups with bodily intimation and speech intimation there can in addition be three vikāra rūpas⁸ of lightness ((lahutā), plasticity((mudutā) and wieldiness((kammaññatā). These three rūpas ensure the suppleness of the other rūpas in these groups. For the movement of the body and the performance of its functions, these three qualities are essential.

Sarah explained that when we walk along there may not be the intention to convey a meaning, but when there is a deliberate movement to show a purpose such as in physiotherapy there is bodily intimation. She gave an example of bodily intimation while typing to convey a meaning or typing for one's own use. She gave an example of speech intimation as "the 'deliberate' making of sound with movement, 'conveying of a meaning' such as when speaking, singing, chanting, making special noises whether to others or oneself."

Sixteen types of citta do not condition rūpa and these are: the five pairs of sense-cognitions (five being kusala vipāka and five being akusala vipāka), the rebirth-consciousness, the dying-consciousness of the arahat and the four arūpa-jhāna vipākacittas.

Someone remarked that Acharn in her early days would often speak about awareness of the level of satipaṭṭhāna whereas today she explains time and again about the different levels of paññā which are pariyatti (intellectual understanding), paṭipatti (direct understanding) and paṭivedha (direct realization by the stages of insight and in enlightenment). Paṭipatti is paññā of the level of direct understanding, but pariyatti, intellectual understanding of what appears now has to be developed on and on until it is very firm so that it can condition direct understanding. The texts of the Tipiṭaka are all about seeing now, hearing now, but this is difficult for all of us. If I had not listened to Acharn and discussed realities with Dhamma friends I would be forgetful all the time.

Not only now but also a long time ago Acharn would explain about the different levels of paññā even though she did not always use the terms pariyatti, paṭipatti and paṭivedha. The Buddha explained these levels of paññā in different ways. After his enlightenment he explained that there are three rounds of understanding the noble truths: sacca ñāṇa, the firm understanding of what has to be known and what the Path is; kicca ñāṇa, understanding of the task, that is, satipaṭṭhāna; kata ñāṇa, understanding of what has been realized, the realization of the truth⁹.

When intellectual understanding has become firm and more accomplished it is sacca ñāṇa. Then one does not move away from the dhamma appearing right now and turn to other practices in order to understand the truth. Sacca ñāṇa realizes that every dhamma that arises is conditioned.

The Buddha, by teaching the three rounds of understanding, reminded us that there is a very gradual development of paññā. It takes a long time for paññā to become direct understanding of realities. We need patience to gradually develop understanding of the dhamma appearing now.

Someone asked: "What is vipassanā?" It is the development of understanding of realities appearing now. People would ask what Acharn's method is. There is no rule to be followed, no method. Pariyatti always pertains to this moment. If we think of a special method we are clinging to an idea of self. We never know the next moment, it may be fear or dislike. Life is just the experience of this moment. This moment falls away immediately never to return. She emphasized that throughout life there are just different realities, some realities that can

⁸Vikāra means changeability. These three rūpas are rūpas without a distinct nature, they are asabhāva rūpas; they are qualities of rūpa that can arise whenever there is bodily movement.

⁹Kindred Sayings, V, Book XII, Ch II, 1: "The setting rolling of the wheel of Dhamma".

experience an object and some that do not experience anything.

During the discussions in Kaeng Kracan that took place after the sessions in Taiwan, Acharn asked: “What is dhamma?”. She said: “The best thing is just understanding the word dhamma. It is reality and includes anything which is real. We do not know reality at all until we hear the word of the Buddha.” She explained that dhamma means “Not I, not anyone, nobody.”

Visible object appears but it does not appear yet as a dhamma, we take it for something or someone. As soon as seeing arises we believe that we see people and things.

Tadao asked what sampajañña is. We read about sati sampajañña, sati and paññā. Sampajañña is not intellectual understanding. Pariyatti is intellectual understanding of the present moment and when it is very firm it conditions paṭipatti, direct understanding. This is the beginning of sampajañña. Paññā knows that there is no self at all and that is sampajañña.

Acharn explained that realities “appear well”¹⁰ to paññā that has been developed to direct understanding through satipaṭṭhāna. At this moment visible object does not appear well, we have doubts about what it is. Without sati it does not appear well. We can see the difference between appearing well and not appearing well. Without paññā it cannot appear well.

Paññā does not appear yet because it is so very slight. But when there is sati it appears well. A reality is experienced well by sati. Without that moment it is only intellectual understanding.

Several times Acharn asked us why we study the teachings. People have different aims. Some people want to become a better person with less akusala. Or they wish to have more calm and happiness in their lives. Then they cling to an idea of self with less akusala and more happiness.

Through the Buddha’s teachings we learn what life really is. It is different from what we always thought before hearing his teachings. We used to think that all events in life last for a while, being sometimes pleasant, sometimes unpleasant. It takes a long time to develop understanding of the truth. We are usually quite absorbed in what is not reality and we tend to think of our experiences with attachment or aversion, we are inclined to take them for self. We want happiness to last. Through the Buddha’s teachings we learn that life is only one moment of experiencing an object through one doorway at a time. Each moment passes away completely. Whatever arises does so because of conditions and it cannot be controlled.

When right understanding of all that is real is being developed there will be less ignorance of what life really is. This does not mean that we do not cling to the idea of self. Right understanding that is still of the level of intellectual understanding does not eradicate the wrong view of self. But when it is firmly established it can lead to direct understanding of the truth that life is only in one moment and then gone forever.

¹⁰In Pāli: suvidita, well known.